

Mount Stanley.  
Queen Margherita Peak.

Queen Alexandra Peak.

King Edward Peak.

Mount Baker.

Grauer Rock.

Wollaston Peak.



Moore Glacier.

## RUWENZORI.

BY DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.\*

LAST summer Mr. Mumm and I undertook a journey to the glaciers of the range which claims to be Ptolemy's 'Mountains of the Moon,' and is known to modern geographers as Ruwenzori. Moritz Inderbinnen, of Zermatt, accompanied us.

From Entebbe, on Lake Victoria, the beautifully situated capital of the Uganda Protectorate, it is an easy fortnight's march or ride to Fort Portal, the British outpost under the low northern spurs of Ruwenzori. Three days more take the traveller to the last village in the Mubuku valley, which offers, as our predecessors had proved, the easiest, if not the only, access from the east to the highest part of the range. Here, to our surprise, we found among the beehive huts a cover of 'Punch' and part of a London weekly illustrated newspaper. They had been left behind by a negro sent out by an English official as a natural history collector. Civilisation advances; our own mail reached us a few miles lower down the valley on our return.

It was early in November when we approached the mountain. The time of our visit, after many inquiries in England from travellers or recent residents in Uganda, had been mainly determined by the printed statement of our most distinguished predecessor that November was likely to be a good month for climbing and exploration. Unfortunately for our plans November proved last year—and I was told locally it generally is—one of the very worst months. It was not till we got to the spot that we ascertained from Mr. Maddock, a mountaineering missionary, from the prime minister of the local potentate, Kasagama, a most helpful and intelligent person, and from numerous natives, that the fine-weather months on the mountain are two—January and July. The plains are then frequently wrapped in haze, but on the heights the air, as a rule, is relatively clear and cold, the streams run low, and the swampy flats are at least partially dried up. You may have bad days, but they are rather the exception than the rule.

We encountered from the first most unfavourable conditions. A torrent our predecessors had all waded without

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\* The substance of Mr. Freshfield's narrative printed above first appeared as a letter to the Editor of the *Times* on January 18 last.

difficulty was unfordable, and had to be bridged. The 8,000 ft. or 9,000 ft. ascent to the head of the Mubuku valley was an alternation of morasses, brimming over under incessant cloud-bursts, of precipitous mud-slides, and rotten barricades of fallen trees, veiling pitfalls deep enough to swallow a man. The so called 'rock shelters' used by the natives when hunting in the dry season were now no better than dripping wells. From morning to night, with too brief intervals, chilly blasts drove the teeming mists up the deep trench between the dark mountain walls, blotting out everything 50 yards off. The universal moisture invaded our tents, it permeated our clothes and bones, and the only exercise possible was wading.

The highest rock shelter in use, Bujongolo, is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hr. below the end of the glacier. Here, for the sake of our carriers, we camped. On the first break in the mists we set forth on a reconnaissance. The head of the Mubuku valley is a flat-bottomed basin, hemmed in on all sides by black cliffs, stained gold above by mosses, draped lower down in the uncanny vegetation excellently described and drawn by Sir Harry Johnston, and recently botanically investigated by Mr. Mawe.\* A considerable expanse of glacier is visible on the sky line in front, spreading out its skirts broadly on the top of the cliffs to the traveller's left, but on his right letting fall a long fold down a cleft or hollow, to within about 500 ft. of the floor of the valley. As at Rosenlauri, but on a smaller scale, a broken icefall is contained between steep rocks. It was probably the appearance of this icefall that induced Mrs. Fisher, the plucky missionary lady who accompanied her husband thus far, to hazard an assertion, which has been recently quoted as authoritative, that the highest summits of Ruwenzori will prove inaccessible. I venture to think that it will not be very long before this prophecy goes the way of many others, made on better grounds, of a similar character. At any rate, this has been the 'sticking-point' of most of the adventurers who have approached Ruwenzori. What actually stopped them was a rock-face, calling for the use of a rope. My companions, who pushed on hoping to make smooth a track for use in our final assault, very soon mastered this obstacle. Above it, however, they were compelled to take to the glacier. In about an hour, after some step-cutting along narrow ridges, which might well prove alarming, or even dangerous, to novices in icework, they found themselves on the verge

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\* See *Journal of the African Society*, No. 18, January 1906.

of the uncrevassed upper slopes, which lead to the gap S. of the highest peak. From distant views we obtained and photographed there is, I feel confident, likely to be little difficulty for practised climbers above this point. But, having regard to the risk that may be run in the icefall by persons unused to glaciers, I have recommended local explorers to prefer a more circuitous route indicated by some of our predecessors, and to endeavour to reach the snow on the top of the cliffs to the left. In this direction one traveller, Mr. Moore, believes himself to have gained the watershed at a height of about 14,900 ft.

My companions stopped when fog again fell on them at a height of 14,500 ft. Their object was entirely a practical one; they had no thought of 'breaking a record.' The motive indicated in this singular phrase is, indeed, hardly recognised among us elder mountaineers. Our battles have been with the mountains, and few of us have ever been at the pains to endeavour to disguise defeat, either to ourselves or others, by claiming minute advantages over less fortunate or less persevering competitors.\*

The opportunity, however, to utilise this reconnaissance never came. Fortune did not give us a chance. Moritz's step-cutting was thrown away. To be overtaken by storm on the well known snowfields of Mont Blanc or Monte Rosa is, as has been too often proved, perilous; to venture in fog upon those of an unknown mountain would have been in the highest degree foolhardy. Our foul weather continued, and 24 hrs. after our retreat to the lower valley its torrent came down in a spate which showed that had we waited longer we might have fared worse.

Though thus defeated in our principal aim we have learnt enough from the distant views we were, in rare but fortunate glimpses, able to obtain to be in a position to do a good deal towards correcting some of the inaccurate impressions recorded by previous travellers. I must postpone for the present many details as to topography and nomenclature. I will mention only a few of the most salient points. The highest crest is not, as has been supposed, the bold rock peak conspicuous from the upper Mubuku valley, but a snowy summit more to the N. It is depicted from the W. in a fine

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\* A German traveller, Dr. David, has stated in a letter (*Globus* for 1904, No. 86, p. 62) that he reached 16,000 ft., on a ridge N. of Dr. Stuhlmann's route on the W. side. He gives no details of any kind.

photogravure in Dr. Stuhlmann's book. From Butiti, the second rest-house from Fort Portal on the Kampala road, we had a clear panorama of the entire range. It was easy to recognise the reversed outline of the portion of it figured in the German plate. For reasons I cannot yet set out fully I feel confident that the highest point does not exceed 18,000 ft. It is supported by several bold rock peaks, the gullies of which hold permanent snow. For the southernmost of these the height of 16,757 ft. was obtained by the English members of the Anglo-German Frontier Delimitation Commission.\*

In comparing Ruwenzori to the Alps or Caucasus the extent of the snowy range has been monstrously exaggerated. A circle 12 miles in diameter would, I believe, completely cover all its glaciers. A remarkable feature in these glaciers, noticeable to a less extent in the Sikkim Himalaya, is that they discharge no meltings, but waste away under atmospheric influences. A tiny clear rivulet, the issue probably of some fountain beneath the ice, is all that represents the source of the highest tributary of the Nile. Trees grow up to 15,000 ft., and the snow line, in any sense in which the term is used by orographers, is not therefore at 13,000 ft., though I did make a snowball at that level. Through the very heart of the chain there is a native pass which must be over 14,000 ft., and which does not touch snow.

The 'Saddle Peak' indicated in some maps, several miles to the N. of the central group, is an invention, or rather a duplication of the highest peak, which has two tops. If Mr. Mumm succeeds in developing his photographs these matters will be made more clear.

We found the mountain tribe the Bakonjo, who served us as porters, very pleasant people. They carried heavy burdens up the worst paths with amazing skill and alacrity; on the march they were willing, helpful, and intelligent. Fortified by the blankets and food we supplied (provisionment gave us no trouble) they endured the weather without a grumble. On rocks they can climb; snow and ice, of course, are beyond them. The slopes round their villages are industriously cultivated, and we saw many plots on the forest outskirts being cleared for maize fields.

With the frosty splendours of the Alps, Caucasus, or Himalaya the solitary African mountain cannot, as I have said, pretend to vie. But the scenery of Ruwenzori has an

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\* See *Geographical Journal*, December 1905, p. 620.

extraordinary character of its own. It must impress even those (and perhaps most those) who are familiar with many of the great ranges of Europe and Asia. The landscapes of the foothills, enlivened by banana groves and beehive huts, by clusters of palms and red-blossomed trees; the deep bays at the base of the central range, clothed in a belt of tropical forest over which frowns the serrated crest of the Portal Peaks—scenery of this kind may be seen elsewhere. But the strange and fantastic aspect of the inner glens, with their dark, smooth, gleaming walls and broken battlements and their almost incredibly grotesque vegetation, is, so far as I know, unique. The traveller is tempted to fancy himself wandering among the relics of an earlier world, or under the influence of a Doresque nightmare. The prevailing impression, in our case at least, was one of gloom. Yet when a passing ray of sunshine slanted across the black and gold cliffs and lit up the lichens on the gigantic heaths the effects of colour were superb.

Beautiful also, when the pall upon the mountain lifted sufficiently to reveal beneath it the sunshine of the lower world, were the views out over the broad valley to the east and across the shining levels of Lake Ruisamba to the hills of Ankole, greener Apennines, glowing through the morning hours in aerial colours, more brilliant and translucent even than those of Italy. Lake Ruisamba is often represented on maps as a backwater of Lake Albert Edward. At the time of our visit it was connected with it by a swift, smooth-flowing stream, several miles in length, and second only in breadth and apparent volume to the Victoria Nile. It is strange that in a region so riverless as Uganda such a feature should have been hitherto little noticed.

In conclusion I should like to point out that in this district we are at this moment engaged in a frontier controversy of some importance with the Congo State, arising from the rough and ready way in which the Foreign Office has been accustomed in Africa to take degrees of latitude or longitude for political boundaries. Here Nature herself had provided one in the Semliki River, which, with a little give and take, ought to be able to be made acceptable to both sides. The Belgians owe much to the Uganda Protectorate, and can hardly afford to quarrel with it. Their mails, their officials, their engineers and machinery, their trade caravans of hides and ivory pass to and fro through it from the east coast to the Upper Congo, to which it affords by weeks the shortest route from Europe. I trust that, at any rate,

Ruwenzori, even if it is not, as was lately thought, the highest mountain in Africa, will not be given away as Kilimanjaro has been. To the native chiefs round its base the question is one of more than sentiment. One of them has recently shown his anxiety by tendering to the Uganda Government the house tax for his whole tribe, in the hope that he might thereby establish his claim to be, and remain, a British subject.

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### HIMALAYAN EXPLORATION.

MR. DOUGLAS FRESHFIELD, in concluding his address to the British Association at Durban in September last, referred to the prospects of Himalayan exploration, and made an important announcement as to communications that had recently passed between Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, and himself. It was to the following effect:—

Lord Curzon, acting on his own initiative, had expressed his desire that some further endeavours should be made to explore, and, if possible, to climb, either Kangchenjunga or Mount Everest, and with this end in view had proposed to Mr. Freshfield to act as an intermediary in organising such an attempt and obtaining the sympathy and material support of the Alpine Club, the Geographical Society, and any other scientific bodies likely to be interested. On his own part he promised to recommend to the Indian Government to contribute substantially to the cost of the expedition, and to do his best to get permission from the Nepalese authorities for its sojourn in their territory.

The matter was accordingly brought before the Council of the Royal Geographical Society and our Committee. The Council instructed their President to make further inquiry of the Viceroy as to the exact scope of the proposed expedition before deciding on any action. The Alpine Club Committee promptly requested our President to express their most cordial appreciation of the Viceroy's suggestion, and their willingness to co-operate as far as was in their power. It was agreed that it was too late for anything to be done last summer; but that the Viceroy should be informed that Dr. T. C. Longstaff, who was just starting for the Himalaya for climbing purposes, might be able to make useful practical suggestions. Dr. Longstaff, after an independent excursion in Kumaon, was permitted by the Viceroy to accompany the official party that visited the Kailas. He has not as yet returned to England.